

Fall 2018

COM 303-001: Video Narrative

Rebekah Rutkoff

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COM303 - Fall 2018
Video Narrative
M 11.30am - 2:20pm — Cullimore 315

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Office hours: W 11.30-12.30 and by appt.

VIDEO NARRATIVE



Grid of film stills assembled by Maya Deren from her own films

Course Description

It's become popular to invoke a 21st century war of literacies: the old-fashioned reading variety vs. the version connected to the vast realm of screen culture. Indeed, as technological advances have led to the infusion of new audio and visual media formats into nearly every form of cultural production, it's impossible to conceive of contemporary literacy without taking the digital into account. But in this course, we'll treat reading/writing and screening/making moving images not as oppositional practices but as inherently and richly connected ones. We'll investigate the video narrative as both a media object and a flexible discourse, one that spans a wide array of uses and genres. In so doing, students will develop new strategies for reading, writing, meaning-making, story-telling and imaginative expression.

Learning Objectives

- Acquire fluency in a variety of historical and theoretical lineages of moving-image semiotics
- Gain familiarity with strategies and techniques for both reading and writing within a visually-based, screen-oriented culture
- Build knowledge of and be able to practice hands-on techniques and technologies to produce both independent and collaborative media works
- Develop and effectively use critical language with respect to relationships between form and content and among media makers, subjects, and viewers
- Show competency in the production and critical analysis of electronic media with respect to: visual narrative structures, writing for screens, moving image genres and paradigms of distribution

Requirements

Videography Assignments

Three major video projects will comprise the bulk of assigned and assessed work. The projects will demonstrate different video genres and will be organized and produced in small, pre-formed groups.

Research and Critical Analysis Assignments

Several assignments are designed to build competency in basic videography techniques, including camera-work, script and storyboard writing and editing. Short exercises assigned toward the beginning of the course will offer students the opportunity to engage with the fundamentals of video production on both individual and group levels. One essay demonstrating capability in integrating creative thinking and critical analysis (applying theory to practice) will be assigned toward the end of term.

Forum Discussion Assignments

Throughout the course, we will read/screen and critically discuss various essays and media works that are central to the discipline of moving image studies. Five separate forum discussion topics will be available via Moodle covering some of the issues and ideas brought up in these works. Five percent of your total grade will depend upon timely, coherent and thoughtful responses to these topics.

Participation

Each class will offer students the opportunity to discuss and question the topics presented both online and offline. Following this format, ten percent of the final grade will be based on both the frequency and quality of the student's comments, questions and observations, with the emphasis on quality. The quality is determined by, among other things, the relevance, insight and clarity of remarks.

Attendance/ Participation: 10 points

Videography Techniques

Storyboard Assignment: 5 points

Shot Analysis: 5 points

Videography Exercises

Film theory/history short answer quiz: 5 points

Transitions: 5 points

Writing Project

Theory-Practice Essay: 10 points

Video Projects:

Instructional: 20 points

Documentary: 20 points

Seriality: 20 points

Grading

Evaluation will follow the university's grading scale:

A = 100-90 (superior)	B = 86-80 (very good)	C = 76-70 (acceptable)	F = 59-0 (inadequate)
B+ = 89-87 (excellent)	C+ = 79-77 (good)	D = 69-60 (minimum)	

Attendance Policy

I expect every student to attend every class and to be on time.

If you miss a class, you are responsible for catching up (please contact me to inquire about missed material) as well as for submitting assignments due on the missed day (before our class meeting time); missed in-class group exercises and workshops cannot be made up.

Every unexcused absence after the second one will reduce your participation grade. More than four unexcused absences (4 weeks of the curriculum) can result in automatic failure of the course; excessive unexcused lateness of 15 minutes or more throughout the course will be considered as one absence. According to university policy, students who expect to miss classes or exams because of religious observance must submit to their instructors, by the end of the second week of classes, a written list of dates that will be missed. Similarly, athletes should submit a list of events. If you can't make a class—due to illness, an academic commitment, an interview, or a major extracurricular event—and you wish to have the absence excused, ask the Dean of Students to review the request.

Technology

Please silence your cell phone completely, and don't have it out in class (except, of course, in cases where its camera-use is connected to class work).

Plagiarism and Cheating

The NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity defines plagiarism *as using or attempting to use written, oral, or graphic work which was authored or prepared by another and submitting it as one's own*. The full Code can be found at <https://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

If your work uses the idea or language of any other person, make that use clear to your reader by citing clearly and thoroughly. If I find plagiarized work, even if it seems to stem from carelessness, I'm required to report it to the Dean of Students.

Documented Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me at the beginning of the semester to discuss accommodations. You may also contact Student Disability Services at (973) 596-3420.

Writing Center

The NJIT Writing Center, located in Central King Building G17, offers one-on-one appointments to help with your written assignments. They are equipped to work with both creative and scholarly forms of writing. Please visit: <https://www.njit.edu/writingcenter/>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note: *the syllabus is subject to change.* Any email or in-class announcements take precedence.

What is Narrative?

Sept. 10 The Ubiquity of “Story”

SCREEN: *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock (1960, 1 hour 49 min.)

DUE (9.12): Forum 1: Modes of Narrative

Language of the Screen/Screen-as-Text

Sept. 17 Screen Culture — Narrative Perspectives — Visual Narration

READ: from *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi
 from *Palestine*, Joe Sacco

Sept. 24 Intro to Basic Shots, Sequences — Theory and Practice of Editing

READ: from *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, Syd Field

SCREEN: *An Optical Poem*, Oskar Fischinger (1938, 6 min.)
 At Land, Maya Deren (1944, 15 min.)

DUE: Storyboard assignment

Editing Dialects

Oct. 1 Passive and Active Viewers

READ: “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey

SCREEN: *Cameraperson*, Kirsten Johnson (2016, 1 hour 46 min.)

DUE: Shot Analysis
 Forum 2: Mulvey

Oct. 8 What Would Eisenstein Say?

READ: Edward Dmytryk, “You’ve Got to Have a Reason,” from *On Editing*
DUE: Videography exercise
QUIZ: Theory/History short answer

Genre 1: The Educational Screen — From Nation-Building to DIY

Oct. 15 Introducing Project 1

SCREEN: YouTube DIY Videos
 US War Department PSAs
 Nostalgia for the Future, Avijit Mukul Kishore and Rohan Shivkuma (2017, 54 min.)
READ: “The First American Anti-Nazi Film, Rediscovered,” Emily Greenhouse
DUE: Forum 3: Instruction and Authority

Oct. 22 Project 1 Production Workshop

Oct. 29 Project 1 Showcase/Critique

DUE: Project 1

Genre 2: Non-Fiction Conventions and Subversions

Nov. 5 Introducing Project 2

SCREEN: *Stranger With a Camera*, Elizabeth Barrett (1999, 1 hour)
READ: “Against Documentaries,” Critical Art Ensemble
DUE: Forum 4: Documentary Mythology

Nov. 12 Project 2 Production Workshop

Nov. 19 Project 2 Showcase/Critique

DUE: Project 2

Genre 3: Experiments in Seriality

Nov. 26 Introducing Project 3

SCREEN: *Man with a Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov (1929, 1 hour 29 min.)
READ: “Metaphors on Vision,” Stan Brakhage

Dec. 3 Project 3 Production Workshop

READ: from *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord

SCREEN: YouTube shorts
 Kevin Everson shorts

DUE: Forum 5: Personal and Political Spectacles

Dec. 10 Project 3 Showcase/Critique

DUE: Project 3

*****Please note:** Theory-Practice essays due December 13